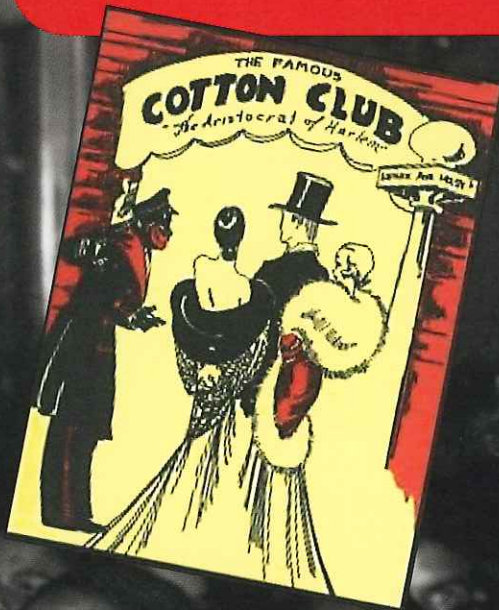
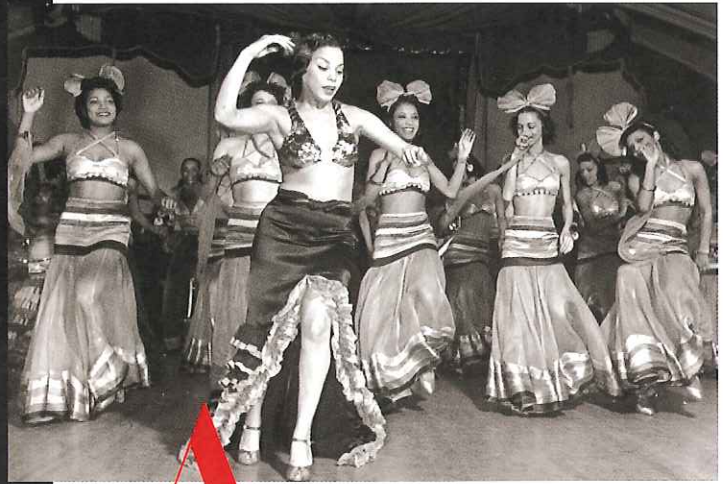


The Harlem Renaissance



POINT OF DISCUSSION

From the 1920s a growing black culture flourished with music, literature and night clubs. Here Duke Ellington and Cootie Williams are playing at the Savoy in Harlem for a black audience. Other clubs, such as the Cotton Club, were only for white people while the entertainers were black. How could this in any way be good for black people?



AS WHITE SOLDIERS went off to the First World War in France in 1914, black migrants moved into the cities and took over their jobs. As a result of this and the massive industrialization of the USA a black middle-class began to emerge. Although in 1917 there were only 2,132 blacks at university they were enough to produce both political and cultural leaders.

370,000 black servicemen joined the American forces during World War I and for the first time some all-black regiments fought with respect and honor for the United States of America. But when they returned home, they were still treated as second-class citizens, even though they had done extensive combat duty.

The first black literary movement was established during the 1920s in Harlem, New York and known as the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes, who wrote *Freedom train* on p. 35 and *Ku Klux* on p. 39 is one of the best known black authors of this period. Also, jazz by black musicians became popular with both whites and blacks. Especially King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band with young Louis Armstrong on trumpet.

But there was still segregation – even in the largely black suburb of Harlem in New York. When the Cotton Club opened there in 1923, the entertainers were mostly black – or rather “light brown”. The black girl dancers had to take the “paper bag test”: only those whose skin color was lighter than a brown paper bag were hired. They also had to be tall and under 21. The clientele were rich whites!

Nevertheless, the Cotton Club also helped black bands like Duke Ellington's to become famous by being the ‘house band’ from 1927-31.

